

Before the Senate Transportation Committee
Presented by Zack Pistora, Kansas Sierra Club
Proponent to SB 349
2-7-24



Chair Petersen and Honorable Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of SB 349, which would establish an intercity passenger rail service program and provide an annual transfer to the passenger rail service revolving fund.

On behalf of our nearly 5000 members across our state, the Sierra Club supports the expansion of passenger rail service in Kansas particularly because of intercity rail's environmental advantages of saving energy, using less land, cutting noise, reducing pollution, and more.

With the transportation sector being one of the highest impact sectors on our environment, including land disturbance and pollution, there is a major opportunity for Kansas to utilize mass transit like passenger rail lines to reduce pollution and environmental disturbances. Comparing transportation options (including air, motorcycles, cars, trucks, and buses), the average per-passenger fuel economy is best achieved by rail because of high ridership, proportionally low drag, and more efficient propulsion. Based on analysis from the U.S. Department of Energy, Amtrak's latest sustainability report (2022) details rail as an inherently sustainable mode of transport, as on average, passenger rail is:

- 34% more energy efficient than domestic air travel with 72% less carbon footprint
- 46% more energy efficient than traveling by car with 83% less carbon footprint

As more people travel by train, less road traffic can reduce health-harming air pollution, especially in urban areas. Intercity passenger rail also stimulates compact development patterns and concentrated infrastructure to reduce city sprawl and harms of land disturbance. More opportunities are being made available for passenger rail to utilize other low-impact transportation modes like walking and bicycling to rail stations too, which further helps the environment and public health. Finally, it important to point out that such intercity passenger rail projects like the Heartland Flyer Extension will help to serve historically disadvantaged communities that have been underserved with transportation options and/or have encountered more environmental hazards with transportation.

Given the environmental and social benefits of intercity passenger rail service, the Sierra Club supports SB 349 and its dedicated funding enhancement for passenger rail service over the next ten years.

The Heartland Flyer Extension between Newton, KS and Oklahoma City, OK would serve a great benefit to the people of Kansas by further connecting our communities and expanding an eco-friendly transportation option to both residents and visitors. We feel this funding is a very worthy investment of taxpayer money. From an environmental standpoint, we especially appreciate this project because it would leverage existing rail infrastructure and lower transportation pollutants along the I-35 corridor and Wichita metro.

Thank you for your consideration. We urge you to pass SB 349 this session.

Sincerely,

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The Sierra Club is the largest grassroots environmental organization dedicated to enjoying, exploring, and protecting our great outdoors. The Kansas Chapter has been our state's strongest grassroots voice on environmental matters for fifty years.